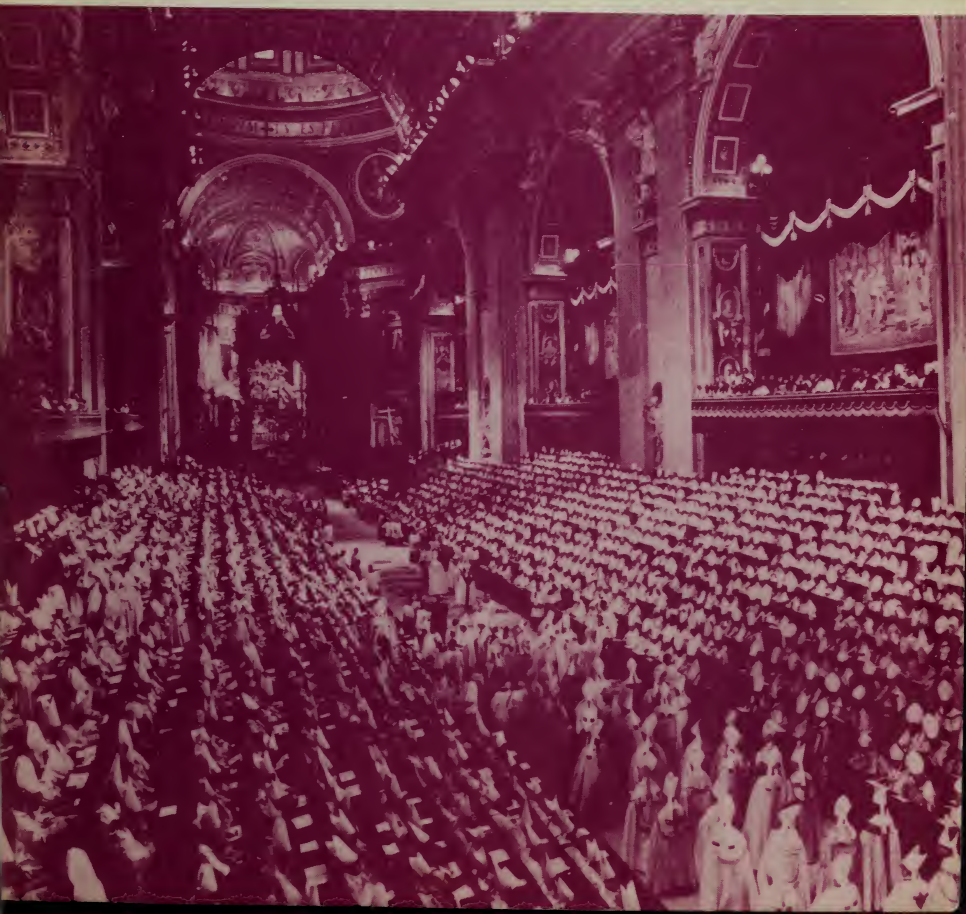


VATICAN COUNCIL II

CHRIST and HIS CHURCH

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INTRODUCTION

The Catholic Bishops and their associates during the Second Vatican Council devoted a long period to study, debate, revision and refinement of a statement of basic Catholic belief concerning the nature of the Church. The document was agreed upon almost unanimously (2,151 votes to 5) and approved by Pope Paul VI on November 21, 1964.

Rich in Biblical allusions, the document is a combination of Catholic tradition and modern theological insight. It is the Catholic Church's most recent solemn expression of its understanding of itself. As such, it surely deserves careful study.

Since its publication, however, the very richness of this statement has proven to be a stumbling block to many, especially to those with little or no theological background. Many readers, for all their interest and good will, have found themselves overwhelmed by the closely worded paragraphs and after a few pages have simply admitted defeat. It is for these and also for others who plan to study the original text later that the following pages are offered.

We think that the simplified version presented here is a faithful condensation of the original. Few Scripture quotations are given but these can be easily enlarged by reference to the Council document itself. The paragraph numbers used here correspond to the original, the letters a, b, c, etc. are added subdivisions of the different numbers.

The original document is called after its first two words "*Lumen Gentium*" and its usual English title is "*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*". A paperback edition of all the documents of the Council is available from USCC Publications, 1312 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005. Ask for "*The Documents of Vatican II*", edited by Walter M. Abbott, S.J. (EC-101) \$2.25.

I. The Mystery of the Church

This first chapter speaks of the Church as a mystery. Mystery here means something which reveals divine power at work in the world. Hence it is partly visible, partly invisible and always at work. The text uses many images to illustrate the mystery: the Church is like a sheepfold, a flock, a tract of land, and so on (n. 6). These are things that can be seen and yet things that have an inner invisible power, a certain living spirit that gives a sense of belonging and of belonging together, a force for fruitfulness and self-renewal, and much more. Paragraphs 5, 7 and 8 are especially rich in meaning. See how the divine Spirit invisibly moves in and through the visible Church to give all men a sense of being "family" (brothers and sisters of Christ) as He calls them together into unity and peace.

1. Today's world shows a strange picture of two movements going in opposite directions. On the one hand, people grow closer together through common interests and in this they are aided by so many means of rapid communication. On the other hand, there is great intensity in feelings of individual identity: men and women, nations, races, social classes, resist being absorbed into any kind of composite. The result is tension and frustration. The Vatican Council speaks to the world in this situation because it believes that the tension and frustration are signs of an unconscious groping for Christ. He is the Light of the World. His Presence among us, His doctrine, His example, His central position in the whole of human existence—as Christians believe—make Him the one and only source of real and lasting unity and peace.

2. This desire for unity, even amid variety, should not be looked upon as something initially dreamed up by men. It is rather a discovery of God's plan within them, according to which they have been conceived and brought into being as members of His intimate family.

3. Christ came into the world to reveal the divine Family which is the Blessed Trinity and to tell men of the place within that family that had been reserved for them and to which they were being called. He offered Himself as the Mediator through whom they would have access to the inner life of God.

4. Now that Christ has completed His natural lifespan and is no longer seen in the flesh among us, His mission has not ceased but continues in another form. Now it is not directly through His own visible presence that He teaches and draws men to the divine family, but rather, it is through the visible presence of those who make up His Church. Through the Church, Christ communicates to men the Holy Spirit who, as the love-bond between Himself and the Father, animates with divine life all who respond in faith to Christ's invitation.

5. This fact of God's family or kingdom made open and available to us is, therefore, the heart of Christ's message; and the calling of all men to it is the essence of His mission. As once He fulfilled this mission with the aid of his bodily faculties, His eyes beaming, His mouth speaking, His hands helping, His feet bringing Him to those in need; as once He reached out to men with visible warmth and tenderness—so now, He continues His ministry, making use of the visible faculties and qualities of the Church. The Church then is no mere grouping of men, any more than Christ was a mere man. Rather, the Divine Spirit in Him is now also in the Church, acting as its very soul, the source of its vitality and life. Here men come together by the same kind of divine creative act which formed physical cells into Christ's body in Mary's womb. Here there is an act of God, creating the Church and breathing into it (continually) God's own Spirit.

6. The Church then has both a surface and an inner dimension. It is visible and invisible, it is human and divine. Since this is so, it possesses a richness of meaning that is not easily described. Hence the Sacred Scriptures have used many comparisons to describe it.

Think of all that is human as well as divine in those inspired images of sheepfold, flock, tract of land, olive tree, vineyard, vine, edifice, house of God, temple, Holy City, New Jerusalem, Mother, Spouse of the Lamb.

7. Of special significance for the richness of its meaning is the image of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ. Christ is the Head. All those united with Him are His members. The Holy Spirit is the soul giving the Head and members living union in mutual charity. This inner communion is symbolized and made effective by the visible union of the Church members as they journey toward the Father by the power of Christ's Spirit given to them in the sacraments, particularly Baptism and the Eucharist. The Holy Spirit, superior to time and space, makes Christ's members one with Him in His life, death and resurrection: sons with the Beloved Son, servants with the most obedient Servant, ministers with Him who came not to be served but to serve.

8. The invisible-visible character of the Church allows it to be compared with Christ, the Incarnate Word. There is no conflict nor real division between the visible structure and the spiritual community. The communal structure serves as the living instrument for Christ's vivifying Spirit. Like Christ Himself, the Church is thus one, holy, catholic and apostolic. One, for there is no division. Holy, for the vivifying Spirit is the Holy Spirit Himself. Catholic, for this means universal and the Church, like Christ, is for all. Apostolic, meaning sent, for as Christ was sent by the Father, so the Church continues His mission.

8a. The Church thus described exists in its fullest extent in the Roman Catholic Church which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in union with him. There are, however, many elements of sanctification and truth—like the scriptures and certain sacraments -- which are also found outside the visible structure of the Roman Catholic Church. These have a relationship with that Church and an interior affinity to it.

8b. In making the claim of being more completely Christ's Church, the Roman Catholic Church shuns any feeling of superiority, sometimes called "triumphalism". While she sees herself as holy by reason of Christ's sanctifying Spirit, she recognizes that on the human side, she is a sinner, a pilgrim, poor and in need of being constantly purified and renewed.

II. The People of God

The word "people" here has a special meaning. It does not refer to a mere multitude of men, women and children. It means an interrelated body of persons, brought together by God's call, taught by Him through appointed leaders and energized with His Spirit. The People of Israel immediately comes to the mind of one familiar with the Old Testament. This is quite fitting for the Church is, in fact, seen as the new Israel. It does not remove or replace the old Israel but rather brings it to the final stage of its divinely intended development.

All that was positive and good in the earlier stages of its history is retained, purified and enriched now by reason of Christ's coming. God who spoke and acted through mere mortals now acts personally in Christ, the God-man. In the brief period from Christ's birth to His ascension, God's presence and power in Christ was seen and felt sensibly. Now these are perceived through faith and celebrated in sensible signs, notably the seven sacraments. Thus God continues to call men together and form them into His special people.

9. God moves to unite into a single people all who fear Him and do what is right. His initiative took the form of a preparatory or Old Covenant with Israel. This has been superseded by the final or New Covenant, establishing the Church of Christ. This Church visibly gathers together all those who in faith look upon Jesus as the author of salvation and the source of unity and peace. For these, the Church is Christ's sacrament, the visible sign and instrument of the Holy Spirit's saving and unifying activity. The Church

is ever open, therefore, to embrace new members so that all men may come to know the gentle yoke of Christ.

10. Through union with Christ, the Church is constituted a priestly people, that is to say, one oriented toward and given the power of worshipping God. In view of this worship, all have a share in Christ's priesthood. Inasmuch as all are ordained to worshipping God and receiving the sacraments, the members share a common priesthood. Inasmuch as some are destined to mold and rule the priestly people, they have a ministerial priesthood also. This is conferred on them through the sacrament of sacred orders. All, in their proper sphere, exercise their priesthood (or more precisely, their share in Christ's priesthood) through the sacraments.

11. Fortified by the powerful means of the sacraments and the exercise of the virtues, all the faithful, whatever their condition or state, are called by the Lord, each in his or her own way, to share in God's holiness.

11a. Through *Baptism*, they are incorporated into the Church and sealed with a special character of Christ's priesthood so that they may exercise the cult of the Christian religion. They are reborn as sons of God with Christ the Son and must confess the faith they have received from God through the Church.

11b. Through *Confirmation* they are bound more intimately with the Church and endowed by the Holy Spirit with special competence and strength which enables and obliges them to spread and defend the faith by word and deed as true witnesses of Christ.

11c. Taking part in the *Eucharistic Sacrifice* which is the font and apex of the Christian life, they offer Christ, the divine Victim to God and themselves along with Him. By receiving Christ in Holy Communion, they are strengthened anew in divine life and both signify and become the community which is God's People.

11d. Those who approach the sacrament of *Penance* or reconciliation find themselves forgiven and restored to unity with God and the Church which, though wounded by their sins, never ceases to pray for their conversion.

11e. By the sacrament of the *Anointing of the Sick* and the prayer of her priests, the whole Church commends the ill to the

suffering and glorified Lord, asking His help and salvation. She aids the patients to unite their sufferings with Christ for the welfare of the whole People of God who cannot but prosper from their loving conformity in faith and hope to the will of God.

11f. Those of the faithful who are consecrated by *Holy Orders* are empowered and directed to feed the Church in Christ's name with the word and grace of God.

11g. In virtue of the sacrament of *Matrimony*, Christian spouses signify and partake in the mystery of the unity of fruitful love which exists between Christ and the Church. The sacrament calls those married to a life of love and holiness and of responsible parenthood. By word and example they are to pass on to their children their faith and love of the Church, encouraging them in their proper Christian vocations.

12. As they share in Christ's priestly office (of worshipping God and sanctifying men), the People of God also share in His prophetic office (of teaching men to know God). As Christ's living witness, possessed by the Holy Spirit, the Church clings to the faith once delivered to the saints (Cf Jude 3) and hands it on. Thanks to a supernatural "sense of faith", the People of God as a whole has an unerring quality when from the bishops down to the last member of the laity, it shows universal agreement in matters of faith or morals.

12a. It is not only through the sacraments and church ministries that the Holy Spirit sanctifies the People of God but also through gifts to individuals. Thus, through the sacraments and ministries and otherwise, the Spirit gives charismatic gifts for the edification (building up) of the Church. These gifts are not to be sought after as if to manipulate God. They must always be subject to the discernment of those who rule over the Church.

13. All men are called to belong to the new People of God. Hence its mission is one of invitation to all. The Church thus shares in Christ's kingship with a claim of the whole of humanity as His inheritance. The Catholic Church, therefore, strives energetically and constantly to bring all humanity with its riches back to Christ its Head in the unity of His Spirit.

13a. From the Church's participation in the priesthood, pro-

phetic office and kingship of Christ, she acquires these characteristics: she is one, holy, catholic and apostolic.

14. The Church as the Body of Christ, the sole Mediator of salvation, necessarily includes all of Christ's members. Hence all must be incorporated (embodied) in Christ through faith and baptism if they are to be saved.

14a. Those who know that the Church was made necessary for salvation by God through Christ and yet refuse to enter or to remain in it cannot be saved.

14b. Those who are fully incorporated must accept the whole of the Church, its invisible reality and its visible structure—and must live out their acceptance. To be saved, all must respond in thought, word and deed to the grace by which they are called to the Church.

14c. Catechumens, those in the process of preparing to be received formally into the Church, belong to the Church by reason of their explicit desire for incorporation.

15. Those baptized but not professing the Catholic faith in its entirety nor preserving unity of communion with the successor of St. Peter are incorporated into the Church, but not fully.

16. Jews are linked to the Church because, once chosen by God, they have never been abandoned by Him.

16a. All who believe in God and live good lives according to their consciences are linked to the Church because such conduct is the fruit of God's grace within them.

16b. All others, deceived by the Evil One, or living in a world without conscious knowledge of God, are linked to the Church in that they are the objects of her solicitude so that they may be saved.

17. The mission of Christ (who was sent by the Father) now coincides with that of the Church. Christ's mandate to the Apostles is passed on to the whole Church. She must labor that the entire world population may become the People of God which in Christ renders all honor and glory to God, Creator and Father of the universe.

III. The Hierarchical Structure

The visible, this-world aspect of the Church, the fact that it is formed of and acts upon men makes some sort of structure necessary. There have to be law and order, else there would be neither unity nor peace. Regarding structure, the Scriptures use the apt word-picture of a building. Christ is the cornerstone — all the other "stones" are aligned with Him. Significantly, the other stones are called "living stones." The structure of the Church then is not meant to be an organizational machine but a coordination of services among the members for the sake of charity and truth. The pope is at the center of this coordinated effort. Out from him in widening circles are the bishops, clergy and laity. Christ is over all and in all, communicating His divine Spirit. Thus, moved by the Spirit, all the members, great and small, share their gifts for the glory of God and the good of all.

18. Christ instituted in His Church a variety of ministries to nurture the constant growth of the People of God. Those who receive sacred power serve the People by guiding all its members toward salvation in freedom and in an orderly way. In calling the Apostles with St. Peter as their chief, Christ established the episcopate as a collegial body with Peter and his successors as the permanent source of unity in faith and fraternal love. The belief of the Church is that the bishops with Peter's successor, the Vicar of Christ and Visible Head of the Church, govern the house of the living God.

19. The Apostles were formed into a collegial body and sent first to the People of Israel and then to the whole world. They were confirmed in their mission at Pentecost. Preaching the word,

they provided the circumstances in which the Holy Spirit moved men to become the living stones in the edifice of which Christ is the cornerstone.

20. Because their mission is to last forever, the Apostles took care to appoint successors in the hierarchically structured Church, charging their successors to provide for their successors in turn. Thus the disposition of ministries through a chain of responsibilities from top to bottom (hierarchy or graduation of sacred powers) would be perpetuated. Chief among these successors are the bishops who in continuity pass on the apostolic tradition. The Council therefore teaches that by divine institution, bishops have succeeded to the place of the Apostles as shepherds of the Church. Whoever hears them, hears Christ. Whoever rejects them, rejects Christ.

21. The bishops, therefore, are the principal witnesses to Christ's presence. As servants of Christ, Priest, Prophet and King, they are stewards (preservers and administrators) of God's mysteries enabling God's flock to participate in them so that it may be sanctified, taught and governed in the way of the Lord.

21a. The bishops, for this reason, are endowed with the fullness of sacred orders, a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit, transmitted by the imposition of hands in episcopal consecration. These orders, as is clear from constant tradition, are to be exercised in hierarchical communion with the head (Pope) and other members of the college of bishops, and are to be passed on through ordination to others.

22. Like St. Peter and the other Apostles, the Pope and the other bishops form a college or corporate group. One is constituted a member of the episcopal college (or college of bishops) by consecration (ordination) and recognized union with the head and members of this body.

22a. The Pope, St. Peter's successor as Vicar of Christ, has supreme authority over all, pastors as well as the rest of the faithful. This authority, of course, is of the spiritual order. Apart from union with the Pope, the college of bishops has no authority.

22b. The episcopal college, inasmuch as it is composed of many, expresses the variety and universality of the People of God. In-

asmuch as it is assembled under one head, it expresses the unity of the Church.

22c. Any collegial action of the bishops must be taken with the authority and approval of the Roman Pontiff if it is to be an exercise of the college's supreme authority over the Church.

23. As the Pope is the visible source and foundation of the unity of the whole Church, the local bishop is the visible source and foundation of the unity of his particular Church.

23a. The whole Church is thus composed of individual Churches modeled after the universal Church and each presided over by its own bishop. Individual bishops exercise pastoral government only over their own Churches; but as members of the college of bishops and successors to the Apostles, they are obliged to be solicitous for the whole Church.

23b. In this latter regard, individual bishops are bound to help wherever possible, in union with the Pope, in providing spiritual and material aid and manpower to other Churches and to the missions.

24. The bishop's power comes from Christ through the Apostles but may be legitimately exercised only when authorized by the Pope.

25. Gifted for this purpose by the Holy Spirit, bishops preach to their flocks the faith they must hold and put into practice if they are to attain salvation.

25a. Bishops teaching in union with the Roman Pontiff (Pope) are to be respected by all the faithful as witnesses to divine and Catholic truth. Especially to the teachings of the Roman Pontiff, religious submission of mind and will is due. This holds even when he is not speaking "ex cathedra", that is to say, solemnly and formally declaring that a certain teaching of faith or morals is to be held as divinely revealed and therefore accepted by all who profess the Catholic faith.

25b. When bishops in union with the Pope teach authoritatively a matter of faith or morals, their pronouncement must be adhered to with the submission of faith (and hence seriously considered in forming one's conscience).

25c. The infallibility (freedom from error in teaching His doctrine) with which Christ endowed His Church is present in the Roman Pontiff individually and in the body of bishops as a college when it exercises with the Pope supreme authority over the Church. When either the Pope alone or the Pope with the bishops proclaims by definitive act some doctrine of faith or morals, the assent of the Church can never be withheld since the same Spirit which moves the teaching Church to teach moves the learning Church to accept.

25d. Such teaching never can be arbitrary but must be in accord with divine revelation which, as written Scripture or preserved by tradition, is transmitted in its entirety through the legitimate succession of bishops and especially through the care of the Roman Pontiff himself.

25e. The better to comply with this norm, the Pope and bishops in submission to the Holy Spirit take pains to examine and give apt expression to the contents of revelation. They do not admit any new public revelation.

26. A bishop, marked with the fullness of Holy Orders, is the nucleus of Christ's presence in the local Church. Through his power and authority, all are united in charity around the altar where the Eucharist celebrates and nourishes the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

26a. By prayer and zeal and the sacraments, the bishop brings Christ's holiness, teaching and dominion to his flock, all the while witnessing by his example to Christ's merciful care.

27. Though the exercise of their power is subject to the supreme authority of the Roman Pontiff, bishops are not vicars of the Pope but of Christ from whom their power is received.

27a. The total view of authority-obedience in the local Church is one of harmony: The Father sends Christ, Christ sends the bishop, the bishop gives his life for his flock. The flock submits to the bishop who submits to Christ who submits to the Father—all in the one Spirit.

28. Commissioned by Christ to a fuller share in His consecration and mission, bishops have legitimately handed on various

degrees of participation in their ministry. Thus, traditionally, there are priests and deacons.

28a. Priests share in the priestly ministry of bishops in the celebration of the Eucharist and administration of the sacraments. They share in the prophetic ministry of the bishops in preaching and teaching under his authority. They share in the kingly ministry of bishops in the exercise of pastoral jurisdiction. Pastors in a sense make the bishop present to the local congregation.

28b. All priests by reason of their common sacred ordination and ministry are bound by fraternal ties to each other and to the bishops.

28c. Priests under the bishops should be models of and ministers for the unification of all Catholics, Christians, indeed, of all men, so that all may be brought into the unity of the family of God.

29. At a lower level of the hierarchy are deacons, upon whom the bishops impose hands "not unto the priesthood but unto a ministry of service".

29a. Strengthened by sacramental grace, in communion with the bishops and priests, the deacons serve the People of God in the ministry of the Liturgy of the Word and of charity.

IV. The Laity

It is necessary to note in this chapter the definition of laity given in number 31. They are the members of the Church who are not clergy, religious brothers nor nuns. The emphasis of this chapter is on the very real place, importance and responsibility this class of members has in the Church. They are, as 31c says beautifully, the leaven or yeast working within the secular world to make it Christian. Their role is thus a vital one and it is theirs, not by the concession of the pope or bishops but by the will of Christ. To neglect it is to fail Christ in His Church. Aware that this important role of the laity has been long neglected, the Council moves here to open the door to their greater participation in the Church's worship, government and mission activity.

(Throughout this section, the term layman is used. This is to be taken in the generic sense as applying also to women.)

30. Attention is now turned to the members of the faithful called laity. They are called to special service and given special graces (charisms) according to the proper roles that they have in the saving mission of the Church.

31. The term laity is given to all the faithful who have been baptized and called to a role in the Church other than that of sacred orders or the religious state. They have their own unique share in the priestly, prophetic and kingly functions of Christ. In their own sphere of influence which is properly the secular world, they are Christ's instruments in sanctifying, teaching and governing men.

31a. Priests can at times engage in secular activities and may even have secular professions, but by reason of their particular vocation, they are chiefly and professedly ordained to the sacred ministry (see III, 29) to "preach the Gospel, shepherd the faithful, celebrate divine worship."

31b. Similarly, religious may be active in the secular world, but their consecration makes their immediate concern that of giving witness to the high quality of charity (as taught in the beatitudes) toward which all in the Church must labor.

31c. But the laity live in ordinary circumstances amid secular occupations and they are called to be the leaven working on the secular world from within. This they achieve through lives resplendent in faith, hope and love.

32. In the Church, though there are different ministries, all the faithful are equal. Pastors minister to one another and to the other members. The laity in turn lend cooperative assistance to their pastors and teachers. St. Augustine, with his usual eloquence, says: "What I am for you terrifies me; what I am with you consoles me. For you, I am a bishop; but with you, I am a Christian. The former is a title of duty; the latter, one of grace. The former is a danger; the latter, salvation."

33. The apostolate of the laity is not just a pious movement. It is a part of the Church's essential mission. Called by Baptism and Confirmation, nourished in love of God and neighbor by the Eucharist, the laity are commissioned to make the Church present and operative in those places and circumstances where only through them can she become the salt of the earth.

33a. Besides the apostolate which touches all the laity, some may also be called to closer cooperation with the hierarchy, or to the exercise of special functions in the Church.

33b. Hence the laity is reminded of its noble duty to extend the plan of salvation. At the same time, the hierarchy is reminded of its reciprocal duty to provide the laity with ample opportunity for its zeal.

34. Through the communication of His Spirit, Christ gives the laity a share in His priestly, prophetic and kingly functions (as noted above, 31.). As worshippers who consecrate their daily work,

cares, sufferings and prayers, offering them lovingly along with the Lord's Body and Blood in the celebration of the Eucharist, the laity share in Christ's priesthood and consecrate the world itself to God.

35. To participate in His prophetic function, Christ gave the laity understanding of the faith and the grace of speech. (cfr Acts 2, 17-18; Rev 19, 10 where the Holy Spirit is seen as present and active in the ministers of the Gospel.) Thanks to the Holy Spirit, the laity are nourished by the sacraments to profess a new heaven and a new earth. They go forth as heralds of faith and hope, announcing Christ by word and example.

35a. Especially valuable in this regard is the married state and family life, sanctified by a special sacrament. In the true Christian home, husband and wife are witnesses to each other and to their children of faith in Christ and love for Him. The Christian home loudly proclaims the present power of the reign of God in the world and the hope of a blessed life to come. Thus, by its example and its witness, it makes people aware of sinful conditions and enlightens those who seek true values in life.

35b. Some of the laity can supply for lack of sacred ministers, especially in places where the Church is persecuted. Some devote themselves entirely to apostolic work.

35c. All the laity are called to cooperate and should strive to acquire a more profound grasp of revealed truth. They should earnestly beg of God the gift of wisdom.

36. To participate in His kingly function, Christ gave the laity the power of subjection so that they might conquer the reign of sin in themselves and might, by serving Him in their fellow men, lead all to Him as their King.

36a. Thus a great promise and mandate is given to the laity, as indeed to all the faithful, whereby they have the privilege and the duty to further Christ's reign: "All are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's." (1 Cor 3, 23.) By their competence in worldly skills and their personal activity, elevated from within by the grace of God, let them work that created goods be equitably distributed and used for the human and Christian development of every last man and woman.

36b. Let the laity by combined efforts remove institutions and conditions from the world which customarily lead to sin. Let them foster moral values in their culture.

36c. Let all the faithful distinguish but harmonize their duties as citizens and as members of the Church. In awareness of the fact that no phase of human endeavor is independent of God, let them be guided by a Christian conscience at all times. They should reject any doctrine which attempts to build a society without any regard for religion, for this is an affront to man's religious liberty.

37. The laity have the right, as do all Christians, to receive from their pastors the spiritual goods of the Church, especially the Word of God and the sacraments. They should openly reveal their needs to their pastors as sons and daughters, brothers and sisters in Christ.

37a. Where a layman's knowledge or other competence makes him worthy of a hearing, he may, and at times must, speak up on what concerns the good of the Church. But let this always be done truthfully, with courage, prudence, reverence and charity toward those who by reason of their sacred office represent the Person of Christ.

37b. Let laymen follow the example of Christ who by His obedience, even at the cost of His life, opened to all men the blessed way of liberty for the children of God. It is in finding and doing God's will, that men are truly free.

37c. All should pray for those placed over them so that the account they have to render both for themselves and those in their care may be one of joy rather than grief.

37d. Let pastors recognize the freedom and responsibility of the laity within the People of God. Let them accept their cooperation in creating, planning and implementing pastoral activities. In this way, all without exception, will share responsibility for the mission of the Church.

38. Each individual man and woman in the laity must stand before the world as a witness to the resurrection and risen life of the Lord Jesus and as a sign that God lives. As individuals and as a group, all Christians (laity no less than clergy and religious) are to be to the world what the soul is to the body.

V. Call to Holiness

Some confuse holiness with ethical goodness — good behavior. But good behavior is a sign of holiness, not holiness itself. Holiness is the dynamic, throbbing, creative love-life of God. Man is holy when through union with Christ he shares in this divine life. Then there is a deep personal intimacy between God and himself. Since Christ came to offer us this life, it follows that He offers it to all, laity no less than clergy and members of religious orders. As a love-gift, it calls for response on man's part. Thus the holiness of the Church is seen as an interchange of divine gifts and human responses. All the members of the Church, each in his proper state, fashions his own generous response and helps the others with theirs. Thus, as a popular phrase has it, love in the Church is both horizontal and vertical — it reaches out to others and up to God. Prior to the Council, some were inclined to think that because they were not priests, brothers or nuns, they were not called to holiness. The Council corrects this idea. Holiness is for all.

39. In the Church, everyone belonging to the hierarchy or cared for by it is called to that holiness which is participation in the intimate life of God Himself. Under the influence of the Holy Spirit, this holiness is striven for by all and is witnessed to particularly by those who practice the counsels of poverty, celibacy and obedience. Some do this privately; others, in the Church-approved state of religious life.

40. Corresponding with the gifts given them, all the faithful (clergy, religious and laity) by the practice of the Christian virtues and by repentance for their sins grow more and more into the like-

ness of Christ. In this they seek the will of God in all things and devote themselves to His glory and the service of their neighbor. Thereby, they enrich both the Church and human society as well.

41. In the various types and duties of life, one and the same holiness is cultivated by all since it is this same intimate life which God shares with all. Moved by the Holy Spirit, all take up their cross and follow Christ to the Father. Their daily cares can lead to holiness if with faith they accept them as coming from God and if they cooperate in showing through their love for others the love God has for the world.

41a. Bishops, as shepherds after the model of the Good Shepherd, respond to the graces given them by exercising pastoral love through prayer, sacrifice, preaching and every form of a bishop's care and service. It is in his very ministry that the bishop finds the principal means of his own sanctification as well as that of his flock.

41b. Like bishops, priests should grow in love of God and neighbor through the daily exercise of their duties. By performing holy tasks in a holy manner and by loyal attachment to their bishops, priests grow in holiness. By their unity in brotherly love with their fellow priests, they continue a tradition of saintly priests responsible for the edification of the whole Church.

41c. Likewise, other clerics, designated as "the Lord's portion", strive to measure up to their holy vocation by prayer and love, by dedication to whatever is true, just and good, and by zeal for God's glory.

41d. Layfolk called to special apostolic work and married couples in faithful partnership and the formation of Christian families find their roads to holiness in the conscientious and prayerful fulfillment of their work—sharing as they do in the fruitfulness of Mother Church.

41e. Laborers who work to perfect themselves and improve life for their fellowmen can, by union with Christ, share one another's burdens in joy and charity and so achieve apostolic sanctity.

41f. Suffering too can be a road to holiness for those who are united to Christ who suffered for the salvation of the world. Seen

in this light, poverty, infirmity, sickness and other hardships, as well as persecution, have deep significance.

42. God's first and most necessary gift is that charity in which we love God above all and our neighbor because of God. This love, like a seed, grows through the Word of God willingly heard and the sacraments frequently received. All the faithful must respond to these, applying themselves constantly to prayer, self-denial, brotherly service and the practice of all virtues.

42a. Love of God and neighbor points out the true disciples of Christ. Martyrdom is the highest form of this love, a grace given to some but an ideal held up to all. Despite the cost, all true Christians must be prepared to confess Christ before men.

42b. As mentioned above (39.), the holiness of the Church is fostered in a special way by those embracing the counsels proposed in the Scriptures: virginity or celibacy, poverty and obedience. Mother Church rejoices to have such men and women.

42c. All Christ's followers are, therefore, invited and bound to pursue holiness and the perfect fulfillment of their proper role in the Church, searching for perfect charity and careful not to be ensnared by the allurements of a world that is passing away.

VI. Religious

Many know of religious orders without knowing exactly what they are or how they fit into the general composition of the Church. The Council describes them as groups of men and women who live in communities distinguished by life styles of chastity (celibacy), poverty and obedience. Formed by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the concern of these groups is to serve the Church as witnesses to the implications of her divine-human nature. By prayer, by dedication, by service but not subservience to the world, they speak for total love of God and neighbor. The Church, absolutely speaking, might well be faithful to her mission without religious. But because men are prone to forget essentials and grow careless, God has given religious to the Church to serve her in part as the prophets served Israel. It is their role, as much by example as by word, to preach, to admonish, to console, to encourage and to do penance for the Church as she feels her way through the world.

43. The gospel counsels of chastity dedicated to God, poverty and obedience modeled on the words and example of Christ are divine gifts to the Church. She treasures them and in response to the Holy Spirit establishes life styles according to them.

43a. Some of these life styles are principally of a solitary nature. Others are communitarian. Religious families of both kinds flourish in the Church like branches of a tree. They develop a life of their own which draws its spirit from and, in turn, enhances the life of the Church.

43b. In these religious institutes, the community provides stability, a proven method of spirituality, fraternal association in the apostolate and liberty strengthened by obedience. In response, the members contribute to the community by acceptance of its way of life and by constant effort to follow the Spirit on the road of love for God and man. Their commitment is formalized by an act of religious profession.

43c. The religious state is not intermediary between the hierarchy and the laity. Rather, it is of a different order, drawing members from both hierarchy and laity.

44. Through the bonds of vows or promises of chastity, poverty and obedience, the religious is totally dedicated to God by an act of supreme love. He (she) is committed to God under a new title which intensifies his (her) baptismal consecration. The life of the religious thus more clearly symbolizes the unbreakable link of Christ with His Spouse, the Church.

44a. The evangelical counsels lead to a charity that moves religious to concern for the whole Church. According to their capacities and the proper vocation of each, they pray and work for the welfare of all.

44b. Profession of the counsels expresses the faith of the Church in the reality of life acquired for us by Christ, a life spent in obedience to the Father by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is a life already at work within men which combines care for the present world with the realization that man has no lasting dwelling here but is called to glory in the heavenly kingdom.

44c. Although the religious state, constituted by profession of the counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience, does not belong to the hierarchial structure of the Church, it belongs inseparably to her life and holiness.

45. As a recognized and respected state of life within the Church, the religious life as lived in the many approved institutes is subject to proper ecclesiastical guidance and control. Some communities are immediately subject to the local bishops, others are subject to the Supreme Pontiff.

45a. Juridical approval gives religious profession recognized legal status. Liturgical celebration of profession proclaims that it

is a state of special consecration to God. The Church accepts religious profession and joins the professed religious in prayers and in the Eucharist.

46. Religious men and women should consider that it is through them that the Church wishes to show Christ praying (He is priest), teaching (He is prophet) and seeking the obedience of all (He is king).

46a. Everyone should realize that a life based on the counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience, though it entails renunciation of certain values, does not hinder personal development. Rather, by its closeness to the pattern set by Christ and His Holy Mother in their lifetime, it suggests great aptitude for development.

46b. All religious contribute to the well-being of their fellowmen. They are profoundly united with them in the heart of Christ where the mystery of man's participation in God's life has its continuing source. Religious men and women by their prayers and services are largely responsible for keeping alive man's awareness of his supernatural vocation to communion with God and neighbor in love.

47. All religious are encouraged to perseverance and excellence in their vocation. Let them work for a more vigorous flowering of divine holiness in the Church and in the world.

VII. Pilgrim Church

Heavenly Church

The People of God as a pilgrim people is a mixture of saints and sinners. Only at the end of the journey will all be perfect.

48. The Church in which we are called to holiness will achieve her full perfection only in the glory of heaven. Then will the human race and its world be perfectly reestablished in Christ.

48a. Christ raised up on the cross and in His resurrection is drawing all men to Himself in the Church through the Holy Spirit. He leads men to the Church, joins them more closely to Himself and nourishes their love with His own body and blood.

48b. In this ongoing restoration, seen in faith, we learn our temporal role of working out our salvation in responsible stewardship toward the Father.

48c. As the world is being renewed but is not yet completed, the Church, possessed of a genuine but imperfect holiness, is a pilgrim, sharing through her sacraments and institutions the painful existence of the passing world.

48d. Signed with the Holy Spirit in the Church, we are truly sons of God with Christ, the Son. But we have yet to share His glory and so long to be with Him completely. With love, but also with awareness of our present danger, we strive to become like Christ while there is still time. In patience and hope, we wait to be raised up to union with Christ in glory.

49. Until Christ's work is completed, His disciples are either in heaven, in Purgatory or in the Church on earth. All, according to

their condition, share the same love of God and neighbor and exchange spiritual goods. This is the communion of saints.

49a. Those in heaven establish the whole Church more firmly in holiness, lend nobility to her worship and in many ways contribute to her greater upbuilding.

50. The Church on earth has always prayed for the dead. She has also venerated with special devotion the Blessed Virgin Mary and the other saints, devoutly imploring the aid of their intercession and imitating their virtues.

50a. In the lives of the saints who shared our humanity and yet were transformed into especially successful images of Christ, God vividly manifests to man His loving intimacy with them. Through the saints, He speaks to us and draws us to Himself.

50b. It is extremely fitting that we love the saints, those friends and fellow heirs of Jesus Christ who are also our loving brothers and benefactors.

50c. When we ask the saints to pray for us, our love terminates in God who is wonderful in His saints.

51. Recalling and reaffirming our faith in the Communion of Saints, the Council urges that all defects, excesses and abuses be removed from our cult of the saints.

51a. Let the faithful be taught that authentic cult of the saints implies deep love, not a multiplication of external acts. We seek from the saints example in their way of life, admission into their company and the aid of their intercession.

51b. In no way does this cult of the saints weaken or detract from God's glory. For all are called to unity in God's family and the more we respond to grace by loving one another and join one another in praising the Most Holy Trinity, the closer we move toward the day when the whole Church of the saints will adore God the Father and Christ, the Lamb who was slain, and sing their praises forever.

VIII.

The Blessed Mother and the Church

In order that God the Son might become truly a man, He had to enter the mainstream of human life and history by being born of a woman. Thus Mary is a vital link in the plan of Redemption as God designed it. The basis for honoring her in a special way is, therefore, primarily the fact that she received a unique role from God. He honored her first and it is His gift that is praised when Mary is praised.

Her relationship to Christ is two-fold: she is His mother inasmuch as He is man; she is His daughter inasmuch as He is God. As His mother, she is His chosen partner in the work of Redemption. As His daughter, she is the first of the redeemed. This dual role of Mary gives rise to rich relationships with us. We pray to the mother and praise God's gifts to her. We imitate the daughter, seeing in her the image of what God's grace will effect in us as individuals and as a Church, if only we respond with her kind of loving openness and obedience.

This chapter in the Council document has its own special headings which clearly show the outline followed by the Bishops in their teaching on the Blessed Mother.

I. Preface:

52. God the Father in determining to redeem men sent His Son into the world. That the Son might be truly man as well as truly God, He was born (like other men) of a woman.

52a. Thus, the divine decree of redemption from the beginning included not only Christ but also Mary from whom Christ was to be born.

52b. The divine decree, or plan, called also "divine economy" or "divine mystery", is revealed and continually at work in the Church which is the Body of Christ (Cfr #7.).

52c. The Church, like Christ its Head, rightly venerates the memory of Mary and her God-given place in the divine plan.

52d. Mary is the first among all the saints in the communion of believers.

53. Mary was redeemed in anticipation of the merits of Jesus, her Son.

53a. Thus prepared, she conceived Him at the message of the angel and is rightly called His mother. Since He is God, she is rightly called Mother of God. Since He is the Redeemer, she is rightly called Mother of the Redeemer.

53b. As Mother of God the Son in His human nature, Mary is the favorite daughter of God the Father and the temple of God the Holy Spirit.

53c. No other creature in heaven or on earth has been more endowed with grace than Mary.

53d. Still, as a daughter of Adam, she is one with all humans and in need of salvation.

53e. Mary is unique inasmuch as she is both a member of the Church and also its mother. She is a member in this, that like all others, she is saved in Christ. She is the mother in this, that by her cooperation with Christ, the members of the Church come into being.

53f. Remaining a mother, she is to her children a model of faith and charity.

53g. It is the Holy Spirit who makes Mary what she is and the same Holy Spirit who moves the Church to love and honor her as a mother.

54. Hence, as it clarifies Catholic teaching concerning the Church in which the divine Redeemer works salvation, this Council wishes to describe Mary's role in the mystery or sacred reality of Christ and the Church.

54a. It also wishes to describe the duties of mankind and especially of the members of the Church toward Mary.

54b. The Council does not plan, however, to give a complete doctrine on Mary, nor does it settle matters which are still being studied relating to the Blessed Virgin.

54c. The Council allows liberty to opinions proposed by different schools of Catholic thought concerning Mary who occupies a place in the Church which is highest after Christ, yet close to us.

II. The Role of the Blessed Virgin in the Plan of Salvation

55. The books of the Old Testament as understood in the Church in the light of later revelation show that Mary's role in the Redemption was foreshadowed and prophesied.

55a. She is par excellence the woman whose seed would crush the serpent's head (Gen 3, 15), the virgin who conceived a child named Emmanuel (Is 7, 17; Mic 3, 5; Mt 1, 22-23). She is the exalted daughter of Sion (Zeph 3, 14).

55b. All these ancient prophecies found fulfillment when the Son of God took human flesh from Mary that in the divinely-human actions of His life He might free man from sin.

56. In God's plan, a place was left open for Mary's free consent in order that as a woman fully consented to man's fall (Eve), so a woman might freely consent to man's restoration (Mary).

56a. In saying: "Be it done to me according to your word", Mary gave to the world Christ through whom men have access to participation in God's own inner life. In this sense, she gave Life to the world.

56b. No wonder the ancient Fathers like St. Germanus of Constantinople (732 A.D.), St. Anastasius of Antioch (609 A.D.), St. Andrew of Crete (766 A.D.) and others called Mary entirely holy

and free from sin, fashioned by the Holy Spirit into "a new kind of substance" and "a new creature".

56c. Adorned from her conception with unique holiness and freedom from sin, Mary was prepared by God from the beginning for her moment of consent to the angel's message.

56d. Mary's life may be summarized thus: Mary consented to God's message and became the mother of Jesus. Embracing God's will with all her heart and without sin, she became the full time servant of Christ and His work. Under His direction and in concert with Him, she fulfilled the role God had given her in the work of redeeming the world.

56e. Catholic tradition, therefore, rightly sees her not as a passive instrument but as a believing and obedient cooperator in our redemption. "What the virgin Eve bound through her unbelief, the virgin Mary loosened by her faith", says St. Irenaeus. St. Jerome adds: "death through Eve, life through Mary."

57. All the incidents in the Gospel explicitly mentioning Mary show the intimate union of Mother and Son in the work of salvation.

58. During the public life of Jesus, Mary is seen advancing in her pilgrimage of faith, loyally persevering in her union with her Son all the way to the cross.

58a. In her suffering at the cross, she followed the divine plan and lovingly consented to the offering of her Son, the divine-human Victim of the saving sacrifice.

58b. Christ, dying on the cross, gave her as a mother to His disciple John and, through him, to all mankind.

59. Since it pleased God not to reveal solemnly until Pentecost that the redemption of men had been accomplished, Mary joined with the Apostles in preparing for that glorious event.

59a. Finally, preserved free from all guilt of original sin, the Immaculate Virgin was taken up body and soul into heaven.

59b. There she was exalted by the Lord as Queen of all, in order that she might be more like her Son, the Lord of lords, and the Conqueror of sin and death.

III. The Blessed Virgin and the Church

60. We have but one Mediator with God, himself the man Jesus Christ, as St. Paul teaches: (1 Tim 2, 5-6).

60a. Mary's motherly care for us in no way diminishes or overshadows Christ's unique mediation. Rather it shows its power in being able not only to work in Mary but also through Mary for the benefit of others. All Mary's saving influences flow from Christ and in no way prevent the faithful from immediate contact or union with Christ.

61. In the same divine wish that decreed the incarnation of the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, Mary was chosen as His mother, associate and handmaid.

61a. As already noted (#56d and #56e), Mary cooperated freely in the Savior's work of restoring man to God's friendship. She did this by her obedience, faith and burning charity. For this reason she is mother to us in the realm of supernatural life, as Eve was mother to us in the realm of natural life.

62. As Mary became the mother of Christ by her free consent at the Annunciation (Lk 1, 38), so she became our spiritual mother by that same consent.

62a. She sustained without wavering her twofold motherhood beneath the cross.

62b. Taken up to heaven, she has not laid aside her maternal role, but continues to intercede for our salvation.

62c. With motherly love, Mary cares for her Son's brothers and sisters who still journey to their happy fatherland.

62d. Since this is so, she is rightly appealed to as Advocate, Helper, Aide, and Mediatrix,—but always in the sense that she neither takes away from nor adds anything to the dignity and unique power of the mediation of Christ.

62e. Her very difference from Christ emphasizes His uniqueness as God-become-man to redeem us.

62f. The point here is one of sharing in Christ's mediation, even as sacred ministers and the laity share in different ways in Christ's

priesthood, and all creatures share in different ways in God's real existence.

62g. The Church professes this sublime role of Mary in caring for us, experiences it constantly and recommends it to all believers. With Mary's help, all may attach themselves more closely to Christ.

63. Mary's role as Mother of God is a divine gift. In it, God unites her with her Son, the Redeemer, and with His singular graces and offices. By reason of these, she is intimately united with His Church.

63a. In St. Ambrose's words, she is the model of the Church in faith, charity and perfect union with Christ.

63b. She is the exemplar of the Church as Virgin Spouse and Mother. (cfr #6.). She virginally conceived and brought forth Christ, the first of many brethren (Rom 8, 29). She did this, as has already been said, by believing and obeying.

64. So, too, Mother Church. Contemplating Mary's divinely bestowed holiness, imitating her love of God and neighbor, and faithfully fulfilling the Father's will, the Church brings forth children by the Holy Spirit.

65. In the most holy Virgin, the Church has already reached the state of being the perfect bride of Christ. The members of the Church look to her as to their ideal, as they strive to follow Christ by conquering sin and practicing virtue.

65a. Contemplating Mary in the light of Christ and His work, the Church enters more intimately into the divine-human union of the Incarnation. As Mary "put on Christ" (Rom 13, 14), so the Church in all its members.

65b. Mary has figured profoundly in the history of God's saving relationship with men.

65c. In a certain way, she unites and mirrors within herself the central truths of the faith.

65d. When she is being preached and venerated, she summons the faithful to her Son and His sacrifice and to love for the Father.

65e. Attracted by Mary's example of faith, hope and charity, her way of searching out and doing the will of God in all things, the Church continually approaches Christ in His glory.

65f. Inspired by Mary's motherly love, the Church reaches out in her apostolic mission so that Christ may be born in the hearts of all men.

IV. Devotion to the Blessed Virgin in the Church

66. The cult of the Blessed Mother from ancient times has been altogether special. By God's will, she holds a place in His plan of salvation above the angels and other saints. She is, of course, like any other creature, infinitely below God.

66a. Her cult differs from that of God not only in degree but also in kind. God alone is supreme and Him only do we adore. Our cult of Mary is one of great reverence and regard for the fairest and most blessed of God's chosen creatures.

66b. Many and varied forms of devotion to Mary, fruit of different cultures and temperaments, are recognized by the Church. Rightly understood and practiced, they do not obscure but rather enhance Christ's honor since all true devotion to her causes Christ to be rightly known, loved and glorified, and His commands observed.

67. The Council endorses the Catholic doctrine of special cult of the Blessed Mother and urges all the members of the Church to foster it, particularly in its liturgical forms.

67a. At the same time, the Council exhorts scholars and preachers to take a sane course between exaggeration and narrow-mindedness. As guides, let them take the Sacred Scriptures, the holy Fathers and Doctors, the various liturgies and the teaching authority of the Church.

67b. As subject matter, let them explain the offices and privileges of the Blessed Virgin as related to Christ, the Source of all truth, sanctity and piety.

67c. Let all guard against language or practice which could give a false impression of the true doctrine of the Church.

67d. Let the faithful understand this: true devotion is not passing emotion or lip-service or attachment to unfounded beliefs. Rather, it proceeds from belief in Christ's teaching by which we are moved to know Mary's excellence, to love her as our Mother and to imitate her virtues.

V. Mary, a Sign of Hope and Solace for the Pilgrim People of God.

68. Mary, glorified body and soul in heaven, is a living symbol of success and of God's fidelity. In her present state she is what every Christian hopes to be, the final, finished, truly holy person which God had planned in creating her. As she is the product of God's grace to her, so we hope to be the glorified products of God's grace to us.

68a. As she was created not for herself alone but also as part of God's plan for us, He presents her to us even now as a sign that He is still with us. This Pilgrim now in her glory is hope, solace and encouragement to those others of the People of God who are still on the road.

69. The Council is pleased to note that many of our separated brethren have great devotion to the Blessed Virgin. That of the Eastern Churches is particularly impressive and inspiring.

69a. May Mary exalted and honored in the midst of all the saints join them in interceding with her divine Son to bring about the union of all who are called Christians and indeed of all men in God's family, the one People of God.

69b. May she not cease so to pray until all men experience the central truth of this Council document, namely that their longed-for unity can be achieved in Christ, and only in Christ. (See #1.)

69c. The document concludes with the endorsement of the whole Council in union with Pope Paul. It is, therefore, an authoritative statement of Catholic teaching. (November 21, 1964.)

Version by

John V. McGuire, C.S.S.R.

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